

She and Allan *By* Sir H. Rider Haggard

CHAPTER XXIII. (Cont'd)

What Umslopogaga Saw.

Why did she do this? I wondered. Perhaps to pretend to powers which she did not possess, perhaps out of sheer selfish mischief, or perhaps, as she asserted, just to teach us a lesson and to humiliate us in our own sight.

Well, if so, she had succeeded, for never did I feel so crushed and humiliated as at that moment.

When I awoke the next morning the sun was well up and after I had taken a swim in the old bath and dressed myself, I went to see how it fared with Inez. I found her sitting at the door of her house looking extremely well and with a radiant face.

I saw at once that she did not know me in the least and thought that she had never seen me before; in short that her mind had gone, exactly as Ayesha had said that it would do. By way of making conversation I asked her if she felt well. She replied, "Oh! yes, she had never felt better," then added: "Daddy has gone on a long journey and will not be back for weeks and weeks."

An idea came to me and I answered: "Yes, Inez, but I am a friend of his and he has sent me to take

you to a place where I hope that you shall find him. Only it is far away, so you also must make a long journey."

"Oh! that will be nice, I do so love travelling, especially to find Daddy, who I expect will have my proper clothes with him, not these which, although they are very comfortable and pretty, seem different to what I used to wear. You look very nice, too, and I am sure that you shall be great friends, which I am glad of, for I have been rather lonely since my mother went to live with the saints in Heaven, because you see Daddy is so busy and so often away that I do not see much of him."

Upon my word, I could have wept when I heard her prattle on thus. It is so terribly unnatural, almost dreadful indeed, to listen to a full-grown woman who talks in the accents and expresses the thoughts of a child. However, under all the circumstances, I recognized that her calamity was merciful, and remembering that Ayesha had prophesied the recovery of her mind as well as its loss, and how great seemed to be her powers in these directions, I took such comfort as I could.

Leaving her, I went to see the two Zulus who had been wounded, and found to my joy that they were now quite well and fit to travel. While I was eating my breakfast Hans announced the venerable Billal, who, with a sweeping bow, informed me that he had come to inquire when we should be ready to start, as he had received orders to see to all the necessary arrangements. I replied—within an hour, and he departed in a hurry.

But little after the appointed time he re-appeared with a number of litters and their bearers, also with a bodyguard of twenty-five picked men, all of whom we recognized as brave fellows who had fought well in the battle. These men and the bearers old Billal harangued, telling them that they were to guide, carry and escort us to the other side of the great swamp, or further if we needed it, and that it was the word of She-who-commanded that if so much as the smallest harm came to any one of us, even by accident, they should die every man of them.

I asked Billal if he were not coming with us, to which he replied, No, as She-who-commanded had returned to her own place and he must follow her at once.

I asked him again where her own place might be, to which he answered vaguely that it was everywhere, and he stared first at the heavens and then at the earth as though she inhabited both of them, adding that generally it was in the Caves, though what he meant by that I did not know. Then he said that he was very glad to have met us and that the sight of Umslopogaga killing Rezu was a spectacle that he would remember with pleasure all his life. Also he asked me for a present. I gave him a spare pencil that I possessed in a little German silver case, with which he was delighted. Thus I parted with old Billal of whom I shall always think with a certain affection.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Great Medicine.

A LITTLE while later we started, some of us, including the wounded Zulus, who I insisted should be carried for a day or two, in litters and some on foot. Inez I caused to be carried immediately in front of myself so that I could keep an eye upon her. Moreover I put her in the especial charge of Hans to whom fortunately she took a great fancy at once, perhaps because she remembered subconsciously that she knew him and that he had been kind to her, although when they met after her long sleep, as in my own case, she did not recognize him in the least.

Soon, however, they were again the fastest of friends, so much so that within a day or two the little Hotentot practically filled the place of a maid to her, attending to her every want and looking after her exactly as a nurse does after a child, with the result that it was quite touching to see how she came to depend upon him, "her monkey," as she called him, and how fond he grew of her.

We made good progress and by the evening of the first day were over crest of the cliff or volcano lip

that encircles the great plain of Kor, and descending rapidly to a sheltered spot on the outer slope where our camp was to be set for the night.

Not very far from this place, as I told him that Captain Robertson had been killed in a fight in which we had rescued his daughter from the cannibals who had carried her off, information which I cautioned him to keep to himself and nothing else that I could help. Also, I warned the Zulus, through Umslopogaga and Goroko, that no mention was to be made of our adventures either then or afterwards, since if this were done the curse of the White Queen would fall on them and bring them to disaster and death.

Inez went to bed that night without seeming to recognize her old home, to all appearance just a mindless child, as she had been ever since she awoke from her trance at Kor. Next morning, however, Hans came to tell me that she was changed and that she wished to speak with me. I went, wondering, and found her in the sitting room, dressed in European clothes, which she had taken from where she kept them, and once more a reasoning woman.

"Mr. Quatermain," she said, "I suppose that I must have been ill, for the last thing I remember is going to sleep on the night after you started for the hippopotamus hunt. Where is my father? Did any harm come to him while he was hunting?"

"Alas!" I answered, lying boldly, for I feared lest the truth should take away her mind again, "it did. He was trampled upon by a hippopotamus bull which charged him, and killed, and we were obliged to bury him where he died."

She bowed her head for a while and muttered some prayer for his soul, then looked at me keenly and said:

"I do not think you are telling me everything, Mr. Quatermain, but something seems to say to me that this is because it is not well that I should learn everything."

"No," I answered, "you have been ill and out of your mind for quite a long while; something gave you a shock. I think that you learned of your father's death, which you have now forgotten, and were overcome with the news. Please trust me and believe that if I keep anything back from you it is because I think it best to do so for the present."

"I trust and I believe," she answered. "Now please leave me, but tell me first where are those women and their children?"

"After your father died they went away," I replied, lying again. She looked at me again, but made no comment. Then I left her.

How much Inez ever learned of the true story of her adventures I do not know to this hour, though my opinion is that it was but little.

She was aware that she had suffered from a fit of aberration or madness and that during this time her father had died and certain peculiar things had happened. There she was content to leave the business, and she never again spoke to me upon the subject.

Of this I was very glad, as how on earth could I have explained to her about Ayesha's prophecies as to her lapse into childishness and subsequent return to a normal state when she reached her home, seeing that I did not understand them myself?

Here I may as well finish the story of Inez, that is, as far as I can. As I have shown, she was always a woman of a melancholy and religious temperament, qualities that seemed to grow upon her after her return to health.

On our return to civilization as it chanced one of the first persons with whom she came in contact was a very earnest and excellent old priest of her own faith. The end of this intimacy was much what might have been expected, namely, that she determined to renounce the world, which I think never had any great attraction for her, and entered a sisterhood of an extremely strict order in Natal, where her considerable possessions, added to her many merits, made her very welcome indeed.

Once in after-years I saw her again, when she expected before long to become the Mother-Superior of her convent. I found her very cheerful and she told me that her happiness was complete. Even then

she did not ask me the true story of what had happened to her during that period when her mind was a blank.

To return to more immediate events. When we had been at Strathmuir for a day or two and I thought that her mind was clear enough to judge of affairs, I told Inez that I must journey on to Natal, and asked her what she wished to do. Without a moment's hesitation she replied that she desired to come with me.

Then she showed me a secret hiding place cunningly devised in a sort of cellar under the sitting room floor, where her father was accustomed to keep the spirits of which he consumed so great a quantity. In this hole beneath some bricks we found a large sum of gold stored away, as Robertson had always told his daughter she would find in the event of anything happening to him. With the money were his will and securities, also certain mementoes of his youth and some love letters, together with a prayer book that his mother had given him.

These valuables, of which no one knew the existence except herself, we removed and then made our preparations for departure.

The place with the store and the rest of the stock were handed over to Tomaso on a half-profit agreement under arrangements that he should remit the share of Inez twice a year to a bank on the coast, where her father had an account.

As we trekked away one fine morning I asked Inez whether she was sorry to leave the place.

"No," she replied with energy, "my life there has been a hell and I never wish to see it again."

Now it was after this on the northern borders of Zululand that Zikal's Great Medicine, as Hans called it, really played its chief part, for without it I think that we should have been killed every one of us. I do not propose to set out the business in detail; it is too long and intricate.

Suffice it to say, therefore, that it had to do with the plots of Umslopogaga against Cetwyo, which had been betrayed by his wife Monazi and her lover Lousta, both of whom I have mentioned earlier in this record. The result was that a watch for him was kept on all the frontiers, because it was guessed that sooner or later he would return to Zululand; also it had become known that he was travelling in my company.

So it came about that when my approach was reported by spies a regiment was gathered under the command of a man connected with the royal house, and by it we were surrounded.

Before attacking, however, this captain sent men to me with the message that with me the King had no quarrel although I was travelling in doubtful company, and that if I would deliver over to him Umslopogaga, chief of the People of the Axe, and his followers, I might go whither I wished unarmed, taking my goods with me. Otherwise we should be attacked at once and killed every one of us, since it was not desired that any witnesses should be left of what happened to Umslopogaga.

Having delivered this ultimatum and declined any argument as to its terms, the messengers retired, saying that they would return for my answer within half an hour.

When they were out of hearing Umslopogaga, who had listened to their words in grim silence, turned and spoke in such fashion as might have been expected of him.

"Macumazahn," he said, "now I come to the end of an unlucky journey, though mayhap it is not so evil as it seems, since I, who went out to seek the dead but to be fed

by yonder White Witch with the meat of mocking shadows, am about to find the dead in the only way in which they can be found, namely, by becoming of their company."

"It seems that it is the case with all of us, Umslopogaga." "Not so, Macumazahn. That child of the King will give you safe conduct. It is I and mine whose blood he seeks, as he has the right to do since it is true that I would have raised rebellion against the King, I who wearied of my petty lot and knew that his place was mine. In this quarrel you have no share, though you, whose heart is as white as your skin, are not minded to desert me. Moreover, if you wished to fight, there is one in the wagon whose whose life is not yours to give. The Lady Sad-Eyes is as a child in your arms and her you must bear to safety."

Now this argument was so unanswerable that I did not know what to say. So I only asked what he meant to do, as escape was impossible, seeing that we were surrounded on every side.

"Make a glorious end, Macumazahn," he said with a smile. "I will go out with those who cling to me, that is, with all who remain of my men, since my fate must be theirs, and stand back to back on yonder mound and there wait till these dogs of the King come against us. Watch a while, Macumazahn, and see how Umslopogaga, Bearer of the Axe, and the warriors of the Axe fight and die."

Now I was silent, for I knew not what to say. There we all stood silent while minute by minute I watched the shadow creeping forward toward a mark that the head messenger had made with his spear

Continued on Next Page.

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